The Audience of the Jacobean Masque, with a Reference to *The Tempest*

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This paper focuses on the role of the royal and aristocratic audience in the masques produced in the reign of James I, the first period of which coincides with the last years of Shakespeare's life and career. Masques were the only dramatic performances of the time in which the audience had such a complex role. The role of James I, Queen Anne, Prince Henry and later on Prince Charles was not restricted to the conventional one of the viewer, but was extended to the inception, production and staging of the masque. Queen Anne and her two sons often crossed the borders separating the actors from the audience and held the key roles of the spectacle. The masquers surrounding them were trusted members of their court who also left their conventional positions as viewers to become actors. The aim of these outrageously costly spectacles was the glorification of the King and his court. However, a close reading of these masques reveals the weaknesses of this form of propaganda and the frivolity and arrogance of its audience. The examination of the masque included in *The Tempest* sets its own questions with respect to the privileges of the people who constituted the masque audience and highlights the reasons that are responsible for the parallel decline of the masque and monarchy.

The Stuart masque was a popular form of courtly entertainment which involved carefully choreographed dances, extravagant costumes and stunning sets, and it usually praised the virtues of the King and his court through sophisticated allegories and symbolisms. During King James's reign the masque evolved into a theatrical presentation which began with professional musicians, dancers and actors, and concluded with royal and aristocratic amateurs—the latter being the key masquers who held

the silent roles of positive mythological or emblematic figures and concepts. These notoriously expensive spectacles were staged on important occasions, usually in Whitehall, and their audience was the royal family and their select guests: diplomats, courtiers and wealthy aristocrats. The masques ended with elaborate dances at the end of which the masquers would "take out" members of the audience to dance with them, thus drawing the spectators both into the spectacle and the ideology that it put forward. More often than not, the masques were followed by banquets and revelling that lasted until the first morning hours.

Unlike other dramatic works from this period, masques did not attract the critics' attention until the beginning of the twentieth century. One obvious reason for this was that they were strictly one-time performances; in fact, not even at the time of their original production would these spectacles be staged more than twice, and this only rarely and on consecutive nights. The other reason for this marginalization of the genre was its "low" status in the eyes of the critics. Interestingly enough, this disregard goes as far back as the glorious days of the masque. Bacon, for instance, who, on one occasion, spent £2,000 for the production of such a spectacle,[1] thought of masques as nothing "but toys."[2]

In the early twentieth century critics like Enid Welsford and Allardyce Nicoll produced surveys of the genre and were interested in tracing its origins, finding, for example, similarities between the masque and traditional folk drama and ritual. Postwar critics explored the structure and iconology of the masques, helping us understand the intricate symbolisms and mythological background of these works. The research of D. J. Gordon, Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong paved the way for the advent of a new wave of critics who had a keen eye for historical detail and a vivid interest in the ideological framework of these performances. The critical studies of the last three decades, deeply influenced by Cultural Materialism and New Historicism, examine the masques within their historical setting and, through them, try to gain insight into the culture and politics of the period. Masques have thus been discussed in relation to contemporary politics, court intrigues, patriarchal ideology and monarchical propaganda. Critics like Jonathan Goldberg, David Lindley, David Bevington, Peter Holbrook, Limon Jersey and Martin Butler, to name some of the most prominent, have convincingly argued that the masque deserves more attention as it is a liter-

1. Bacon spent this amount for the production of the *Masque of Flowers* (1613).
2. See Bacon 117.

ary form that "did not simply reflect history but in a sense . . . helped to make it'" (Butler, "Early Stuart Court Culture" 435). The latest critical works also pay attention to issues of gender and race. Several articles have been written on the role of Queen Anne in the production of masques and the appearance of female masquers in them.[3] Other articles have focused on masques with "exotic" themes or figures like *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty* and read these texts within the ideological framework of British colonialism.[4] Furthermore, the more recent studies approach masques not only as written texts but also as stage performances, music and dance.

This paper focuses on the role of the royal and aristocratic audience in the production and performance of masques in the reign of James I and concludes with a brief study of the masque included in *The Tempest.* The examination of this pseudo-masque allows us glimpses of Shakespeare's opinion of the masque as a genre, as well as his views about its audience, the latter being at once the "elite" audience of his own plays and, quite often, their very theme. As I will argue in this paper, the attitude and practices of the audience (the royal family and their select guests) within the masque world reveal these people's overall attitude and practices in the real world. At the same time, by examining the various roles and postures the masque audience adopted, we can gain insight into and draw links between the declining status of the masque and the declining ideology of monarchy. Thus, while

3. See, for example, Hardin Aasand, " 'To Blanch an Ethiop, and Revive a Corse': Queen Anne and *The Masque of Blackness*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*. 32.2 (1992): 271-85; Suzanne Gossett, "'Man-maid, begone!' Women in Masques," *English Literary Renaissance* 18.1 (1988): 96-113; Kim F. Hall, "Sexual Politics and Cultural Identity in *The Masque of Blackness*," *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics*, ed. Sue Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 3-18; Kathryn Schwarz, "Amazon Reflections in the Jacobean *Queen's Masque*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 35.2 (1995): 293-319; and Marion Wynne-Davies, "*The Queen's Masque*: Renaissance Women and the Seventeenth-Century Court Masque," *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 79-104.
4. See, for instance, Bernadette Andrea, "Black Skin, the Queen's Masques: Africanist Ambivalence and Feminine Author(ity) in the Masques of Blackness and Beauty," *English Literary Renaissance* 29.2 (1999 Spring): 246-81; William Over, "Familiarizing the Colonized in Ben Jonson's Masques," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 2.2 (2004): 27-50; and Yumna Siddiqi, "Dark Incontinents: The Discourse of Race and Gender in Three Renaissance Masques," *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992): 139-63.

Stuart masques seek to glorify their elite audience, they actually expose the shaky ground upon which the privileges of this audience were founded and explain why the monarchical and aristocratic edifice was too weak to last for much longer.

The most important member of the masque audience and main addressee of the spectacle was the King. Next in line of importance came the Queen, Prince Henry, Prince Charles and Princess Elizabeth, the foreign royalty and ambassadors (when these events were staged on the occasion of such visits) and, last but not least, the extended world of courtiers and members of aristocratic families in favor with the court. The role of the royal family was not restricted to the conventional one of the viewer, but was extended to include the inception, production and staging of the masque. Authors like Ben Jonson worked closely with their royal patrons, discussed their ideas with them, suggested topics, adopted their suggestions, received money from them, depended upon royal funding for the frequently outrageous expense their masques entailed and used the Banqueting House in Whitehall as a theater. The masquers were usually royal favourites—both male and female—but sometimes the chief masquers were Queen Anne, Prince Henry and, later on, Prince Charles. In other words, the royal audience was at the same time co-author, co-director, producer, patron and player. Furthermore, the audience was also the theme of the play since the main focus of the masques in James's reign—regardless of the occasion for which they were written—was the power of the king and his beneficial, almost miraculous influence upon his subjects. And this glorifying image of the monarch was often developed alongside a flattering and congratulatory representation of the court members.

In order to develop the central allegory of these spectacles, playwrights sometimes wrote anti-masques that would precede the main masque and present comic or ugly figures, the anti-masquers. These would act in bizarre or unacceptable ways, dance to unmelodious, rough music and eventually disappear before the spectacular arrival of the masquers or would be scared away by the latter. The role of these ridiculous or disagreeable figures was twofold: they were there to be laughed at by the audience and, most importantly, to help build a contrast between themselves and the beautiful, honorable and lofty masquers, that is, between the rowdy and low world of the commoners and the orderly, thriving, almost divine world of the court. Not surprisingly, while the masquers were strictly members of the court or the royal family, the anti-masquers were professional actors. The latter were also given whatever speaking parts there were in the main masques, since the

masquers were mute. There is evidence that, on some occasions, these roles were played by Shakespeare's company, the King's Men,[5] and thus, no doubt, sometimes, by the bard himself. The fact that, in all likelihood, Shakespeare was sometimes an anti-masquer, enabled him to have good knowledge of these entertainments and the particulars of their performance. Furthermore, this involvement brought him even closer to the ideology of the court and the monarchical propaganda, something which was unquestionably useful for the development of his own approach to sensitive political issues in his dramas and the construction of many central characters of his plays, characters representing monarchs, their consorts and their courts.

A few months after James succeeded Elizabeth on the throne, he signed a patent according to which Shakespeare's company came under his patronage and was named the "King's Men." From 1603 to 1613 the King's Men played 138 times before the court, whereas this same acting company "had played, under various names, only 32 times in the last ten years of Elizabeth's reign" (Kernan xvi). As for the years between James's enthronement and Shakespeare's death, the King's Men provided 177 of the 299 plays performed at court (xvii). Returning to masques, critics believe that more than 100 masques were produced in the reign of the Stuarts, though many of them are now lost (Ferris 67; Styan 187-97).

The frequency with which plays were performed at court raised significantly the amount of money the King spent on dramatic performances; a considerable amount of this money concerned the production of masques, and this was something that the masque audience would never fail to notice. *The Masque of Blackness* (1605), for instance, cost £3,000 and this displeased the King's Privy Council, the highest executive body in the government. A contemporary account of the affair records that a few days before the performance the Council expressed its reservations to the King (both about the cost and the pregnant Queen's performance in it), but eventually it "would not . . . have the masque abandoned, for though a saving of £4,000 would follow, yet the change would be more pernicious than the expense of ten times that value; for the ambassadors of foreign Princes will believe that the masque has been forborne because the King or the Queen lack £4,000" (Harrison 171-72). The above comment points to the function of the masque as a show of monarchical power and wealth in the eyes of foreign ambassadors, who were often the intended audience of such masques. When in 1608

5. The King's Men participated, for example, in Jonson's *Love Restored* (1612) and *The Golden Age Restored* (1616).

Jonson's *Masque of Beauty* was performed at court, Ambassador Guistiniani was dazzled by it; this masque too had been commissioned by the Queen—who was again a key masquer in it—as a kind of sequel to *The Masque of Blackness* (Welsford 180). The ambassador's description proves that, in several cases, masques did influence the opinion the foreign ambassadors had of the English court: "the splendour of the spectacle . . . was worthy of her Majesty's greatness. The apparatus and the cunning of the stage machinery were a miracle, the abundance and beauty of the lights immense. . . . But what beggared all else and possibly exceeded the public expectation was the wealth of pearls and jewels that adorned the Queen and her Ladies, so abundant and splendid that in everyone's opinion no other court could have displayed such pomp and riches" (qtd. in Bishop 100).[6] When two or more ambassadors were in town, it was a matter of serious speculation when to invite each of them, or where to place their seats, if they were to be all present in the same performance. Invitations and seating arrangements in masques were taken notice of by the interested parties and even caused minor diplomatic episodes since they were seen as indicative of the King's foreign policy.[7]

During the performance of masques the King and his guests were sitting on a raised platform under a canopy facing the stage, and this was called "the State;" furthermore, the King was sitting on a throne. The space between the stage and the State accommodated the dancing that concluded the masque, whereas the rest of the audience were sitting on the two sides, facing the dancing space and the platform where the King sat. Where the members of the audience sat signified a lot about their relationship with the King and their position in his court. On the other hand, the King's strategic positioning underlined his authority, as he was at once the most privileged viewer and the center of the audience's attention: it was him that the audience had almost directly in their sight, not the stage and its actors. This placement of the King on the raised platform, which was a kind of stage in itself, cannot but remind us of James's acute awareness that his position as a King was much akin to that of an actor performing an important dramatic role in front

6. The rich jewels of the female masquers were frequently an issue commented upon by the beholders. In Jonson's *Hymenaei* (1606), a witness remarked: "I think they hired and borrowed all the principal jewels and ropes of perle in court and citty. The Spanish ambassador seemed but poore to the meanest of them." See the introductory comments on the masque in Jonson's *Hymenaei* 30.
7. For contemporary reports and comments on this issue, see Carleton 54-55 and Harrison 182.

of an audience—his subjects: "A king is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly do behold,"[8] wrote James in his *Basilikon Doron*, and his public conduct often revealed that he was indeed performing a role carefully devised for the particular audience; his conduct while on the State during the performance of masques revealed precisely the same but, as we shall see, it was far richer in meaning.

The King was the focal point of the performance both figuratively and literally since, no matter what the "official" theme of the masque was, its underlying theme was the monarch's divine power and status. Apart from the fact that the whole spectacle was performed for and addressed to the King, very often both masquers and anti-masquers addressed him directly or underwent transformations as a result of merely being looked at by him. In Jonson's *Irish Masque* (1616), for instance, a group of half-naked, vulgar, rowdy Irishmen were transformed into "new-borne creatures," with courtly manners, English accent and proper clothes; the intended meaning was that the King had the power to transform and reform his subjects, without even putting any effort: "And all get vigour, youth, and spright, / That are but look'd on by his light" (qtd. in Limon 183). In some masques, the King would also accept symbolic gifts offered to him by the masquers, thus being turned into an active member of the performance, an actor himself. And that was not the only instance in a masque when he would be involved in acting.

The King's arrival, presence and departure constituted a play within a play, a royal show of authority, wealth and artistic intelligence. As argued above, James, fully aware of the dramatic potential of his position both as a ruler and a spectator of masques, put the appropriate emphasis upon his presence in these performances. As Dudley Carleton noted in describing how the first Christmas of James's reign passed at court, "The first holy days we had every night a public play in the great hall, at which the king was ever present and liked or disliked as he saw cause, but it seems he takes no extraordinary pleasure in them. The queen and prince were more the players' friends . . ." (53). Sometimes, contrary to what happened in all other public performances, at the end of a masque, James, as the primary guest of honor and implied ruler of the spectacle, would ask certain parts that he particularly enjoyed to be repeated (Limon 29). The King would not think inappropriate of him either to express his opinion of what he saw the moment he saw it; there were times when he joked with the masquers, or made loud comments of approval or disapproval. In the performance of *Pleasure Reconciled*

8. Quoted in Kernan 19.

to Virtue (1618), for instance, despite the excellent dancing of his son, Prince Charles, James was so bored and disappointed at the dancing of some masquers that he attacked them verbally; Orazio Busino, chaplain to the Venetian ambassador, records that the King, "who is naturally choleric, got impatient and shouted aloud Why don't they dance? What did they make me come here for? Devil take you all, dance" (qtd. in Welsford 207). The unpleasant climate was reversed by the shrewd and gifted Duke of Buckingham, "his Majesty's favourite," who, "Upon this . . . immediately sprang forward, cutting a score of lofty and very minute capers, with so much grace and agility that he not only appeased the ire of his angry lord, but rendered himself the admiration and delight of every body . . ." (qtd. in Welsford 207). Instances like the above, on the one hand emphasized James's position as an absolute ruler, but on the other hand put to question the image of the wise monarch and temperate court that masques were trying to construct, exposing those weaknesses of the King that made him increasingly unpopular.

The negative image of the court the masques sometimes presented to and projected upon their own exclusive audience was also due to the disorder that occasionally followed them. In some cases there were too many spectators and too little restraint, and this displeased the more sober guests and degraded the image of the kingdom in the eyes of foreign diplomats. In a letter to John Chamberlain on January 7, 1605, the diplomat Dudley Carleton made acrimonious comments on the situation at court the evening *The Masque of Blackness* was performed:

> The confusion in getting in was so great that some ladies lie by it and complain of the fury of white staffs. In the passages through the galleries they were shut up in several heaps betwixt doors and there stayed till all was ended; and in the coming out, a banquet which was prepared for the king in the great chamber was overturned, table and all, before it was scarce touched. It were infinite to tell you what losses there were of chains, jewels, purses, and suchlike loose ware, and one woman amongst the rest lost her honesty, for which she was carried to the porter's lodge, being surprised at her business on the top of the terrace. (68)

Similar disorder ensued in 1618, in the banquet after the performance of Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*. Orazio Busino concluded his description of the event with disappointment and contempt: "After he [the King] had glanced all round the table he departed, and forthwith the parties concerned pounced upon the prey like so many harpies. . . . [A]t the first as-

sault they upset the table and the crash of glass platters reminded me precisely of a severe hail storm at Midsummer smashing the window glass. The story ended at half past two in the morning and half disgusted and weary we returned home" (qtd. in Welsford 207).

What happened within Whitehall when masques, plays and other entertainments took place was not knowledge restricted to the elite guests. The script of many masques circulated in print together with detailed descriptions regarding their scenery, costumes and the actual performance, letting the wider public know how the court entertained itself. [9] The fact that in these performances the King was often surrounded by ambitious courtiers of questionable morality and that by pursuing such costly pleasures he was wasting the kingdom's wealth gave his enemies good grounds to regard him and his court as frivolous and loose. Ballads like the following attest to the damage the court masques caused to the public image of the King:

> At Royston and Newmarket
> He'll hunt till he be lean.
> But he hath merry boys
> That with masques and toys
> Can make him fat again. (Thomson 176)

Thus, in the eyes of many, the royal masques were not symbols of the court's power but epitomes of its corruption and idleness.[10]

James was not the only target in relation to the excesses associated with masques. Another popular target was his Queen, who was not only the second most important member of the masque audience as well as chief masquer but also a key figure in the production of these spectacles. Queen Anne commissioned and closely supervised the production of seven court masques, suggesting themes and dances, and deciding upon who was going to perform which part. The Queen made her inventiveness and active spirit apparent right from the first year of James's reign in commissioning the first Christmas masque, Samuel Daniel's *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*. The Queen's plans had set the court in motion several weeks before the masque's performance, on January 8, 1604, at Hampton Court. Anne obviously wanted to present an impressive spectacle and to achieve this she went so far as to allow her co-performers to choose their costumes from the late

9. *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604) was printed a few days after its performance, "as well as a ballad telling of it; but they are called in because of certain offence taken" (Harrison 107).
10. On this issue, see also Norbrook 102.

Queen Elizabeth's gowns. As Lady Arbella Stuart wrote on December 18, 1603, "The Queene intendeth to make a mask this Christmas to which end my Lady Suffolk and my Lady Walshingham have warrants to take of the late Queenes best apparel out of the Tower at theyr discretion" (197). Dudley Carleton was impressed by the masque, but one of the things that he noted, not without humor, was the outfit of the Queen, who was playing the part of Pallas: the lady masquers' "attire was alike, loose mantles and petticoats, but of different colors. . . . Their heads by their dressing did only distinguish the difference of the goddesses they did represent. Only Pallas had a trick by herself; for her clothes were not so much below the knee but that we might see a woman had both feet and legs, which I never knew before" (55).

Anne was equally active the following Christmas and the result was Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, a masque that caused quite a stir for a number of reasons. First of all, it was the Queen who commissioned the masque and "it was her Majesty's will," as Jonson explained in the introduction to the masque, not only "to have . . . blackamoors" (1) but to share with her ladies the extraordinary roles of black women. It can only be speculated whether Anne had taken this idea from Shakespeare, whose *Othello* had been performed at court just a few months earlier, in the fall of 1604. Anne and her favourite court ladies appeared as "the daughters of Niger," who had gone to England to be turned white by "Neptune's son," James I. The King was presented as "a sun . . . Whose beams shine day and night, and are of force To blanch an Ethiop and revive a cor'se" (6). The Queen was not intimidated by the objections that had been expressed by the Privy Council and went ahead with the performance, despite the fact that she was six months pregnant. Several of the select guests, however, disapproved too of the bizarre spectacle; Dudley Carleton was one of them: "The presentation of the mask at the first drawing of the traverse was very fair and their apparel rich, but too light and courtesanlike. Their black faces and hands, which were painted and bare up the elbows, was a very loathsome sight and I am sorry that strangers should see our court so strangely disguised" (68). In another letter Carleton remarks: "you cannot imagine a more ugly sight than a troop of lean-cheeked Moors" (qtd. in Welsford 178). Another spectator, however, treated the odd appearance of the Queen and her ladies with humor, remarking that the Spanish ambassador took out the Queen to dance "and did not forget to kiss her hand, though there was danger that it would leave a mark on his lips" (Harrison 182).

Critics nowadays assume that Anne's occasional movement from the State to the stage and her transformation from the second most important

member of the audience into a key performer, together with her direct involvement in the production of masques, must have annoyed James, as she was thus putting herself at the center of the spectacle and the audience's attention.[11] Furthermore, critics believe that Anne used masques to promote her own political agenda in a number of subtle ways: by co-deciding with the playwrights the main allegories of the commissioned masques and by choosing not only the masquers who would appear in them but even what members of the audience these masquers would eventually "take out" to dance with.[12] Anne's involvement in court entertainments seemed to have attracted more negative than positive responses even within the court circles. Lady Anne Clifford, a staunch royalist, a Lady close to the court, a regular spectator of masques and an occasional masquer herself, wrote in her diary in 1619: "Now there was much talk of a Mask which the Queen had at Winchester, & how all the Ladies about the Court had gotten such ill names that it was grown a scandalous place, & the Queen herself was much fallen from her former greatness & reputation she had in the world" (27).

Anne's appearance as a chief masquer may have annoyed many of her contemporaries but she was by no means the first royal member of the audience that became a masquer. Henry VIII was the first English monarch who took part in a masque in 1512. The king with eleven others appeared disguised and later asked several ladies from the audience to dance with them (Hunter 528).[13] This incident is no doubt what made Shakespeare include such a scene in *Henry VIII*, where the masked King takes out Ann Boleyn to dance with him. Queen Elizabeth too had participated in similar spectacles, transforming thus, as some critics believe, this kind of entertainment: "Once the sovereign became an actor, the entertainment . . . had to be designed around her, not directed at her. . . . Elizabethan entertainments made the Queen herself part of the action, so that the borderline between drama and audience dissolved" (Cooper 140). This dissolution of the boundaries between the stage and the audience was a major characteristic of Jacobean masques too.

It was a sign of distinction and high social status to be invited to court masques. One's physical proximity to the King signified his favorable position within the court and his eligibility for powerful posts. Maybe this ex-

11. See the introduction to *The Masque of Blackness* in Kinney 360.
12. For a discussion of this issue, see Barroll.
13. For more information on the appearance of English monarchs in masques, see Stephen Orgel, "The Monarch as Masquer," *The Jonsonian Masque* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981) 19-36.

plains why the female members of the audience would take off their masks (Limon 96), something they would avoid doing when visiting public theaters. The female masque-goers wanted their presence to be registered by their peers; if their attendance of public performances and their mingling with their social inferiors was open to censure, their attendance of masques was commendable and envied. The presence of the social elite on these occasions gave them the opportunity to socialize, show off their wealth and advertise their status, depending on where they were put to sit. So, apart from having artistic value, these events were excellent opportunities for public relations and, of course, revelry, though always under the supervision of the monarch. As we have seen above, the latter was playing the role of the benevolent and generous host, as well as that of the mighty King, whom the subjects/guests ought to feel gratitude for and honor. In this respect, "the court masque . . . was the court itself, that very same stage on which the monarch and his attendants performed the daily rituals of court ceremony and government. . . . The court masque . . . is a political event; it is kingship in action" (Sharpe 179-80).

The spatial arrangement of the stage, the dancing space, the State and the audience's seats during the performance of masques promoted the idea of unity and order both in dramatic and political terms, encouraging the courtly audience to feel as part of the spectacle. This was reinforced by the fact that the main performers were people of their own rank and that at the end of the performance the masquers would "take" members of the audience "out" to dance with them, thus breaking down completely the barriers between players and audience. As Arthur F. Kinney has noted, "by merging the masquer with the spectator, masques effectively transform the courtly audience into the idealized world of the poet's controlling vision, another way in which what begins dialectically ends in synthesis and unity" (359).

The audience was blended with the masquers not only by dancing with them, but by being transformed into players themselves in a number of ways. Like the masquers, the audience wore costumes too, clothes that bespoke their status and that were appropriate for these special events. Their conduct during their presence in the Banqueting House was actually a performance of a role in accordance with their social standing, wealth, gender and education. Last but not least, in sitting around their King, full of admiration and respect for him or simply fearful of his power, they performed the same role with the masquers: that of the obedient subjects who honor their King and who, in return for their loyalty and submission, receive his hospitality and favor. In this respect, when hosting masques, the Banqueting

House became a microcosm of the court society and a theater which staged simultaneously two spectacles of the same theme: the affirmation of the monarch's authority and its sanctioning by his aristocratic subjects was the theme of the performance not only of the actors on the stage but of all that were present in the hall for this occasion.

The masque audience consisted of men and women of high social status as well as advanced educational level and artistic intelligence. This gave the authors of masques the opportunity to draw upon mythological figures and complex allegories without being afraid that they would not be understood. Jonson openly expressed his high opinion of the particular audience: "especially at these spectacles . . . men, beside enquiring eyes, are understood to bring quick ears, and not those sluggish ones of porters and mechanics . . ." (*Masque of Queens* 37). Samuel Daniel, too, was full of praise for the royal and aristocratic masquers and audience and full of contempt for the commoners who would appear in antimasques. In his *Tethys' Festival* he prides himself on avoiding the appearance of such people: "And in all these shows this is to be noted, that there were none of *inferior sort* mixed amongst these great personages of state and honour (as usually there have been) but all was performed by themselves with a due reservation of their dignity. . . . The introducing of pages with torches might have added more splendour, but yet they would have *pestered* the room . . ." (64, my emphasis). In Daniel's mind, the presence of the "inferior sort" in the masque would almost taint a place like the Banqueting House, which was reserved only for "great personages," just like most positions of authority.

Critics have underlined the difference between the Elizabethan progresses, which took place outdoors and were therefore visually accessible to people of all classes, and the Jacobean masques which were enclosed within the impervious walls of Whitehall. The former sustained "the myth of a unified . . . feudal society" (Chibnall 81), whereas the latter exposed the widening gap between the upper and the lower classes. The distance between the privileged few and the underprivileged masses was epitomized in the shutting out of the latter from such occasions and locations. Interestingly enough, one of the masques written in James's reign turns this issue into one of its themes. In Jonson's *Love Restored* (1612), Robin Goodfellow, "the honest plain country spirit" (67), is refused entrance to the palace to watch a masque. He resorts to all sorts of tricks and disguises, most of which fail, and he is repeatedly turned away with verbal or physical abuse and scorn. After he has finally managed to enter the Court, he describes his trials with humor and this is meant to cause the audience's laughter.

The only occasion when middle and lower class people would be temporarily included in the audience of masques was when the latter involved a procession through the city. This was the case with George Chapman's *The Memorable Masque,* written to celebrate the wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Frederick, Elector of Palatine in 1613. This masque was commissioned and paid for by the Inns of Court; it involved an impressive "march on horseback to the Court from the Master of the Rolls his house, with all their right noble consorts, and most showful attendants" (74). The attire of the fifty gentlemen was, as usual, impressive and costly; even their horses were richly decorated: "Their horse, for rich show, equalled the masquers themselves, all their caparisons being enchased with suns of gold and ornamental jewels . . . even to the dazzling of the admiring spectators" (76). Thus, on such occasions the wider public became for a while part of the select audience and could see with their own eyes what expense and pomp these entertain-ments involved.

The betrothal of Princess Elizabeth took place around the time that Shakespeare was writing *The Tempest* and many critics believe that it was this event that inspired Shakespeare to include a masque in it. In *The Tempest* the masque is commissioned by Prospero to celebrate the marriage of his daughter Miranda to Ferdinand, and it is presented in front of the three of them, resembling thus the masques written to celebrate actual royal or aristocratic weddings. Furthermore, *The Tempest* was one of the fourteen plays and three masques that were performed at court as part of the celebrations for the wedding of King James's daughter.

It is intriguing that although Shakespeare was by that time a successful dramatist whose plays were frequently performed at court, he never wrote masques. The closest thing to a masque that he ever wrote was this pseudo-masque in *The Tempest*. Some critics find the appearance of this masque problematic and have gone so far as to argue that it may have not been written by Shakespeare but by a fellow playwright and that it was not part of the original version but a later addition, probably for the second performance, this time at court (Smith 220). Others think that Shakespeare's play "capitalizes on public sentiment about the wedding. It offers a wedding masque for those many persons who were not invited to the . . . costly, one-time masques staged at court. . . . It gives the nation as a whole . . . a chance to do what the royal family and the courtly entourage did to honor the occasion . . . to be present at a ceremonially splendid mythologizing of a wedding, and to ponder the dynastic and metaphysical implications of such a union" (Bevington, "*The Tempest* and the Jacobean Court

Masque" 220). In this respect, even for the short time that the masque in *The Tenpest* lasted on the popular stage, Shakespeare's non-aristocratic audience would be able to occupy the forbidden to them position of their social superiors, attending a spectacle that on no other occasion would they be able to watch.

Prospero shares with James a number of characteristics, as critics have noted. Both were the kind of viewers these spectacles were primarily addressed to and were judged by: they were rulers who strove for absolute authority over their subjects and family, fathers who arranged the marriages of their offspring, and patrons who commissioned masques for the celebration of such events; finally, neither James nor Prospero were mere spectators, but they actually controlled the spectacle in front of them. Prospero orders the beginning of the masque by addressing both Ariel, who is co-director and masquer, and the affianced couple, who are the exclusive audience; and, through the latter, he extends his orders to Shakespeare's audience too:

> PROSPERO Well.–
> Now come, my Ariel! Bring a corollary
> Rather than want a spirit. Appear, and pertly.
> *Soft music*
> [To FERDINAND and MIRANDA] No tongue, all eyes! Be silent.
> (4.1.56-59)[14]

The performance begins and, when Ferdinand expresses his amazement, Prospero's response makes clear that the masque has been devised by *him*, it promotes *his own* "fancies"/plans, and it is with *his* magic that it moves forward; in this respect, Prospero is at once its author and director, and, like James, a player in it too, since it is with his supernatural power that transformations take place:

> FERDINAND This is a most majestic vision, and
> Harmonious charmingly. May I be bold
> To think these spirits?
> PROSPERO Spirits, which by mine art
> I have from their confines called to enact
> My present fancies.
> …….

14. Textual quotes are taken from *The Tempest* in *The Norton Shakespeare* edition, 1997.

PROSPERO Sweet now, silence.
Juno and Ceres whisper seriously.
There's something else to do. Hush, and be mute,
Or else our spell is marred. (4.1.118-22, 124-27)

Once more like James, Prospero decides, for his own secret reasons and purposes, to end the masque, and he does so abruptly and without any justification. Having suddenly remembered that he has to deal with Caliban's conspiracy, he demands the departure of all except Ariel, who is going to help him defeat his enemy. First, he dismisses the masquers, "Well done! Avoid; no more!" (4.1.142), and then the exclusive audience—his daughter and son-in-law. Seeing that the latter is troubled at this sudden ending, he tries to excuse himself, but without explaining what is really bothering him: "Our revels now are ended. . . . Bear with my weakness. . . . If you be pleased, retire into my cell, / And there repose . . . (4.1.148-62). Like James, Prospero not only has a say in when the revels will come to an end, but he also finds it fit to suggest what his guests should do next. What *he* will do is entirely up to him to decide.

The unexpected ending of the masque has puzzled not only Shakespeare's critics, but, no doubt, several of his audiences too. The audiences of *The Tempest* in the public theaters from Shakespeare's time to the present have most probably shared Miranda's and Ferdinand's bewilderment; to Shakespeare and the court audience, however, it must have been intelligible, or even ordinary. Prospero, like James, behaves as a typical ruler who firmly believes that he governs by divine right and has thus absolute authority. He does not have to explain his "fancies" to anyone; he can order Ariel, his playwright, the masquers and the audience to do what pleases him, and he expects his plans to materialize. As a frequent visitor to the court for the performance of his own plays and as an anti-masquer in the masques of others, Shakespeare had first-hand experience both of the fickleness of the King and of the "superfluous excesses,"[15] of these "vanit[ies]" (*Tempest* 4.1.41). He must have repeatedly witnessed the chaotic circumstances of many royal entertainments and the ridiculous image of the court they inevitably staged even for their select, Crown-friendly audience. From this point of view, it would not, I think, be unreasonable to assume that the comments Prospero makes on the nature of masques and the masque scenery echo Shakespeare's low, if not scornful, opinion of these grand spectacles and

15. This is how the Puritan Plutus characterizes masques in Jonson's *Love Restored* 69.

probably explain why he did not try his hand in them: the masque visions are sooner or later "melted into air, into thin air" (4.1.150); the breathtaking, costly scenery of Inigo Jones, "The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, / The solemn temples, the great globe itself . . . shall dissolve" and shall "Leave not a rack behind" (4.1.152-55).

The masques of Shakespeare's time were sumptuous spectacles in the service of monarchical propaganda, and their audiences (both the select guests in the court and the common people in the streets) perceived them as such. Whether they actually managed to advance the fame and status of the monarch in the eyes of his subjects is open to question. What there is no doubt about is what they reveal in terms of their audience's perception of itself. The royal family and the chosen few who would be invited to the court masques felt that they were a world apart from their social inferiors and would not tolerate to see them in elevated dramatic roles, or in low ones but side by side with the main masquers. This "inferior sort" was only fit to serve and entertain them, and this included the authors of masques too, who always observed the relevant rules. If Shakespeare, for instance, did play the part of an anti-masquer, he had no choice but to appear as a ridiculous or abhorred figure and disappear soon afterwards to leave the stage empty for the glorious entry of his social superiors—the royal and aristocratic masquers. In the brief masque he himself produced, however, he broke two major staging rules: his anti-masquers (the reapers) dance with the masquers (the nymphs) and share the same stage with Ceres, Iris and Juno. Secondly, the masque ends not with revelling and rejoicing but with Prospero's dark thoughts and fears. The "majestic," "harmonious" spectacle (4.1.118, 119) staged upon Prospero's orders does not help him forget his problems, nor does it help him solve them. The supreme ruler breaks it off "distempered," "vexed" and "troubled" (4.1.145, 158, 159). In this respect, the conduct of the chief member of the audience in Shakespeare's masque highlights the less glorious image of the absolute monarch.

The masque will officially die on the scaffold together with Charles I in 1649. Charles I will be the last English monarch to appear on stage as a masquer, and he will die as a chief masquer too, on a raised platform outside the windows of the Banqueting House. By that time the courtly masque audience will have lost most of its prerogatives both in the theater and in real life. On this final performance of its King, it will not have exclusive and privileged access to the royal spectacle but will watch it mingled with and even ousted by "the inferior sort." The executioner/anti-masquer will not only appear on the stage together with a chief-masquer, as in Prospero's

masque, but will remain on it, upright and victorious, next to the lying, decapitated body of his King. From then onwards it will primarily be those people formerly excluded from the masque audiences —not the "great personages of state and honour"— who will determine the success or failure of a play and the fate of their country.

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